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ABSTRACT

The reading achievement of children with and without kindergarten experience was investigated as part of the Comparing Reading Approaches in First Grade Teaching (CRAFT) Project in New York City. Children in grades 1 and 2 were taught reading by one of two approaches, skills centered or language experience. Within the former approach, two methods were used: basal reader or phonovisual (basal reader plus a phonics program). The latter used a regular language experience method or a language experience audiovisual method. No control was exerted over the approach or method used during third grade. The Stanford Achievement Test was administered to 416 kindergarten and 168 nonkindergarten children at the end of grade 1. The Metropolitan Achievement Test was administered to the same group at the end of grade 2. At the end of grade 3, 329 kindergarten and 114 nonkindergarten children were given the Metropolitan Achievement Test. The individual pupil was used as the statistical unit. Results indicated that the type of experiences provided Negro urban disadvantaged children in the New York public school kindergarten appeared to be beneficial only for those who had subsequent reading instruction in a language experience program. Their largest gains were made in grade 3, indicating delayed effects for this approach. References and tables are included. (WB)

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by

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Effect of Kindergarten on the Reading of Disadvantaged Children[1]

Coleman Morrison and Albert J. Harris

This study of children with and without kindergarten experience is part of a larger one called the CRAFT Project (Comparing Reading Approaches in First-Grade Teaching) which investigated progress in reading of disadvantaged urban Negro children in the New York public schools (Harris, 1968). The study, which began in 1964 and was completed in 1967, followed children from the beginning of grade one through grade three.

Children in the study were taught to read by two approaches, Skills Centered and Language Experience. Within the Skills Centered Approach there were two methods, a Basal Reader Method, which followed the traditional basal reading program, and a Phonovisual Method, which combined use of basal readers with a separately taught phonic system. The Language Experience Approach developed reading materials from the experiences and verbalizations of the

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1. This paper is a report of one part of the results of Project No. 5-0570-2-12-1, supported by the U. S. Office of Education, The City University of New York, and the Board of Education of the City of New York.

children and gradually moved into individualized reading. This approach also consisted of two methods, a regular Language Experience Method, and a Language Experience Audio-Visual Method in which several kinds of audio-visual supplementations were used (e.g., tape recorders, cameras, projectors).

During the first two years of the study, pupils were instructed in reading by the same method which their first grade teacher used. At the third grade level, however, no control was exerted over the method or approach used to teach reading. Since the basal reading program is in widespread use throughout the New York City school system, it is probably safe to assume that instruction in the third grade more closely approximated the Skills Centered than the Language Experience Approach.

Results for the kindergarten study are based on tests taken by those children who had attended kindergarten for a minimum of 101 half-days and a maximum of 200 half-days, and for those children who did not attend kindergarten at all. The Stanford Achievement test was administered to 416 kindergarten children and 168 non-kindergarten children at the end of grade one, and the Metropolitan Achievement test was administered to the same number of children at the end of grade two.[2] At the end of the third grade the population included 329 kindergarten children and 114 children without kindergarten experience.

In analyzing the results, means and standard deviations were derived from test scores. Means were then converted into grade equivalent scores and values were obtained for comparisons between children with and without kindergarten experience and between the Skills Centered and Language Experience Approaches for children with and without kindergarten. The comparison of

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[2]. The N's for the first and second grade population are equal since scores for the children were analyzed only for those who took first and second grade posttests.

methods and approaches in the final report (Harris, 1963) used the class as the statistical unit. The present report, dealing with varying numbers of kindergarten and non-kindergarten children in each class, used the individual pupil as the statistical unit. For this reason, some differences that appear as significant in the present study are no larger than differences reported as non-significant in the final report.

Since results of the study are undoubtedly influenced by the nature of the curriculum provided in kindergarten, it should be pointed out that the program in New York City was probably comparable in 1963-4 to that found in most large urban school systems throughout the country. Essentially the program was aimed at developing the social and emotional attributes of the children with some corresponding effort to expand intellectual abilities. In the field of Language Arts children shared personal experiences, listened to stories read by the teacher, and utilized available resources to expand their vocabularies, improve oral experiences, and share ideas. No formal instruction in reading was provided.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

At the end of the first grade, 21 grade equivalent comparisons were made and all comparisons but one favored the kindergarten group (Table 1). Fourteen of these comparisons were statistically significant when raw scores were compared despite the fact that grade equivalent differences for these scores only rarely exceeded one month.

When kindergarten children taught by the Skills Centered Approach were compared with kindergarten children taught in the Language Experience Approach (Table 4) there was one significant difference favoring children in Skills Centered classes on the Paragraph Meaning subtest of the Stanford. The non-kindergarten children in the Skills Centered classes did significantly better

than non-kindergarten children in the Language Experience Approach on Word Reading and Word Study Skills subtests of the Stanford.

By the end of the second grade the children who had kindergarten experience did better than the children who did not on 11 of the 14 comparisons and 9 of these were significant (Table 2). On most of these comparisons kindergarten children averaged two months higher than non-kindergarten children. In the three remaining comparisons there were no grade equivalent differences.

Comparisons between approaches revealed no significant differences when children with kindergarten experience in the Skills Centered and Language Experience Approaches were compared, or when children without kindergarten experience were compared on the same basis.

At the end of the third year there were only four significant differences among the 14 comparisons made and all four favored children with kindergarten experience taught by the Language Experience Approach over non-kindergarten children taught by the same approach (Table 3). All other comparisons within the Language Experience Approach favored the kindergarten children. Within the Skills Centered Approach kindergarten children taught by the Basal Reader Method had higher grade equivalent scores than non-kindergarten children, but the reverse was true of children taught by the Phonovisual Method. Here the non-kindergarteners scored four months higher than kindergarten children on the Word Knowledge subtest of the Metropolitan and one month higher on the Reading subtest. The mean grade equivalent score of 3.7 reached by the non-kindergarten Phonovisual children on Word Knowledge approximated the national norm and was one month higher than the grade equivalent score made by the kindergarten children in the Language Experience and Language Experience Audio-Visual Methods.

Comparisons between approaches revealed a significant difference favoring Language Experience kindergarten children over Skills Centered kindergarten children on both Word Knowledge and Reading tests. The differences for non-kindergarten children within approaches, while favoring the Skills Centered children, were not significant.

DISCUSSION

The types of experiences provided Negro urban disadvantaged children in the New York public school kindergarten appears to have been beneficial only for those children who had subsequent reading instruction in a Language Experience reading program. The initial grade equivalent advantage of one month held by this group over non-kindergarten children increased steadily during the following two years until their advantage at the end of the third grade was five months on the Word Knowledge subtest and three months on the Reading subtest. When it is considered that third grade posttests were administered in April, mean grade equivalent scores of 3.7 and 3.6 made by Language Experience kindergarten children are at, or close to, the national norm. In addition to the advantage held by Language Experience kindergarten children over non-kindergarten children taught by the same approach, this former group also did significantly better than Skills Centered kindergarteners.

This latter finding raises several points. Because the kindergarten experience to which these children were exposed consisted essentially of a Language Arts program where components of the curriculum were similar in nature to subsequent Language Experience instruction it could be hypothesized that this continuity of instruction had a beneficial effect on the children involved. However, findings from this study reveal that at the end of the second grade mean grade equivalent scores for the Language Experience classes were not significantly better than those attained by children in Skills

Centered classes. Indeed as a group they performed less well than the Skills Centered group on the Word Knowledge subtest. The greatest gains made by the Language Experience students occurred during the third grade, where it is believed that a basal reading method or Skills Centered Approach was the chief tool of instruction. Thus, the findings suggest that the kindergarten program had greater delayed effects than immediate effects on children whose early reading instruction was obtained through a Language Experience Approach, and that initial instruction using the Language Experience Approach reinforced by Skills Centered instruction had a salutary effect on this same group of children.

It is not known why kindergarten children in the Skills Centered Approach did not make gains during the third year which were commensurate with those made by non-kindergarten children. But the fact remains that Skills Centered kindergarten children did not achieve higher scores than non-kindergarten children when the study was concluded, and suggests that the kind of kindergarten program offered these children in 1963-4 did not have any lasting effects on reading performances. Further research is necessary to determine whether third grade achievement would be higher for these children if the kindergarten program stressed activities which were more commensurate with subsequent Skills Centered instruction. A recommendation to this effect was made in the final CRAFT report.

References

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Table 1

Grade Equivalent Comparisons between Children with and without Kindergarten Experience, Grade 1

Method and Approach	Stanford Achievement Test					
	Word Reading		Paragraph Meaning		Word Study Skills	
	With	Without	With	Without	With	Without
Skills Centered Approach						
Basal Reader	1.5	1.4	1.6*	1.5	1.5**	1.4
Phonovisual	1.5	1.4	1.5*	1.3	1.4	1.4
Total	1.5*	1.4	1.5**	1.4	1.5	1.4
Language Experience Approach						
Language Experience	1.5**	1.3	1.5**	1.4	1.4	1.3
Language Experience Audio-Visual	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.4**	1.3
Total	1.5**	1.3	1.5**	1.4	1.4**	1.3
All Methods	1.5**	1.4	1.5**	1.4	1.5**	1.4

* $P < .05$
** $P < .01$

Table 2

Grade Equivalent Comparisons between Children with and without Kindergarten Experience, Grade 2

Method and Approach	Metropolitan Achievement Test			
	Word Knowledge		Reading	
	With	Without	With	Without
Skills Centered Approach				
Basal Reader	2.3*	2.4	2.3*	2.1
Phonovisual	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.3
Total	2.6	2.4	2.3	2.3
Language Experience Approach				
Language Experience	2.5*	2.2	2.4*	2.1
Language Experience Audio-Visual	2.4	2.4	2.3*	2.0
Total	2.4*	2.3	2.4*	2.1
All Methods	2.5**	2.4	2.4**	2.2

* $P < .05$
** $P < .01$

Table 3

Grade Equivalent Comparison between Children with and without Kindergarten Experience, Grade 3

Method and Approach	Metropolitan Achievement Test			
	Word Knowledge		Reading	
	With	Without	With	Without
Skills Centered Approach				
Basal Reader	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.3
Phonovisual	3.3	3.7	3.4	3.5
Total	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.4
Language Experience Approach				
Language Experience	3.6**	3.1	3.7**	3.3
Language Experience Audio-Visual	3.6	3.4	3.4	3.4
Total	3.6**	3.1	3.6**	3.3
All Methods	3.4	3.3	3.5	3.4

** $P < .01$

Table 4

Comparisons between Approaches of Children with and without Kindergarten Experience

Test	With		Without	
	Skills Centered	Language Experience	Skills Centered	Language Experience
Stanford - Grade 1				
Word Reading	1.5	1.5	1.4*	1.3
Paragraph Meaning	1.5*	1.5	1.4	1.4
Word Study Skills	1.5	1.4	1.4*	1.3
Metropolitan - Grade 2				
Word Knowledge	2.6	2.4	2.4	2.3
Reading	2.3	2.4	2.2	2.1
Metropolitan - Grade 3				
Word Knowledge	3.3	3.6*	3.4	3.1
Reading	3.4	3.6*	3.4	3.3

* $P < .05$